

## **Health and Exposure Research for the Agricultural Community: The Agricultural Health Study**

**Authors:** Kent Thomas, Michael Alavanja, Dale Sandler, Cynthia Hines, Joy Pierce, Charles Lynch

**Key Words:** Agriculture, health, exposure, National Cancer Institute, National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences

The Agricultural Health Study (AHS) is a collaborative effort between the National Cancer Institute, the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. The AHS is the most comprehensive prospective epidemiological study developed to examine agricultural exposures and health in the agricultural community. Beginning in 1994, information about pesticide use, work practices, and health has been collected from over 89,000 pesticide applicators and spouses in Iowa and North Carolina.

Scientists have the opportunity and responsibility to communicate important research findings to the communities they study. A goal of the Agricultural Health Study is to provide research results that can be used to identify factors that promote good health and ways that members of the agricultural community can more effectively protect themselves against possible risks. A multi-faceted approach has been developed in the AHS to disseminate research results. A website ([www.aghealth.org](http://www.aghealth.org)) is updated quarterly; it explains the purpose of the study, the study status, and provides summaries of research findings. Recognizing that many people do not have internet access, we have developed state-level communications plans that involve the AHS Field Stations in North Carolina and Iowa in the dissemination of results. Several approaches are used to reach as wide an audience as possible, including direct mailings, distribution to and through the Cooperative Extension Services, farm publications, newsletters, distribution of flyers at agricultural meetings, and contact and interaction with agricultural organizations. Information is also made available to the public through the communications offices of the collaborating agencies. Results are published in the scientific literature and important scientific findings are summarized into lay-language fact sheets. Ongoing communication is planned as new health and exposure results become available from this prospective study. AHS researchers continue to collaborate with other experts and community stakeholders, including rural health providers and pesticide safety educators, who will be able to integrate study findings into educational materials and community programs.

**Contact Information:** Mr. Kent Thomas  
Research Physical Scientist  
ORD/National Exposure Research Laboratory  
(919) 541-7939  
[thomas.kent@epa.gov](mailto:thomas.kent@epa.gov)

Michael Alavanja  
National Cancer Institute

Dale Sandler  
National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences  
National Institutes of Health, DHHS

Cynthia Hines  
National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

Joy Pierce  
Battelle Centers for Public Health Research and  
Evaluation

Charles Lynch  
University of Iowa Department of Epidemiology